CRISISWATCH

DEAR READER, twenty years ago, on 1 September 2003, the first edition of Crisis Group's early warning bulletin was born. Covering about 50 situations of conflict at the time, CrisisWatch has evolved into a much more sophisticated tool, becoming a leading reference for those seeking to prevent conflict or mitigate its effects.

Qualitative in essence, relying on the reporting, expertise and analysis of Crisis Group's analysts across the world, and our research team based in Brussels, CrisisWatch offers regular assessments of how overall political and security developments indicate improvement, degradation or stabilisation in situations of conflict and potential conflict.

Our global conflict tracker now covers about 70 conflicts, crises and vulnerable countries every month. Crisis Group's research team also monitors major developments in another 50–60 situations, with a view to detecting early signs of deterioration.

Our dedicated readers welcome that CrisisWatch comes out like clockwork at the beginning of each month, flagging situations to watch – either because there is a risk of deterioration or because we see **an opportunity to advance peace.**

TRACKING CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

Our global conflict tracker monitors past trends and upcoming alerts each month. In the yearly timelines on the following pages, red indicates a deteriorated situation, green an improved situation and orange an unchanged situation. Yellow indicates an upcoming risk alert and blue a resolution opportunity.

This month, as we mark our 242nd edition, we take pride in CrisisWatch's steady tracking, as we believe that regular monitoring is essential to identifying shifting trends and mobilising an international response that can mitigate the risk of conflict. Our database, reflecting our dedication to this work, serves as a unique repository of conflict trends over the past twenty years.

In this brochure, we seek to reflect on the early warning nature of CrisisWatch by describing how it tracked the emerging risks of mass violence in three specific cases: Ethiopia, Haiti and Yemen. These case studies highlight the accuracy of Crisis Group's assessments, the reliability of its policy judgments, and the usefulness of identifying conflict risks and scenarios before situations boil over. But these case studies also underscore

how difficult it can be to bridge the gap between early warning and early action – and how this failure can sometimes have terrible consequences.

We at Crisis Group believe in the importance of responding early and quickly to conflict signs. As the world becomes increasingly volatile, with the number of state and non-state conflicts on the rise in the last decade, we are convinced that having sound and timely information about trouble spots is the first step toward successful prevention.

Comfort Ero, President and CEO
Isabelle Arradon, Director of Research

Working to Prevent a Destructive Battle for Hodeida

Yemen's war, now in its eighth year, has turned an already poor and struggling country into a site of human tragedy, with hundreds of thousands of civilians killed and some four million displaced. Crisis Group's global conflict tracker, CrisisWatch, has been a sober voice over the years surveying the war's numerous phases and amplifying the organisation's calls at strategic times to support peace.

In January 2015, Crisis Group was among the first to raise the alarm about the deteriorating political situation amid the rapid territorial expansion of northern Houthi rebels and prospects of Yemen's "territorial fragmentation". Two months later, when Saudi Arabia and a coalition of regional actors supported by the United States launched an air campaign against the Houthis to restore the government in Sana'a, CrisisWatch warned of the escalation risks. It said that

A man stands among the wreckage of his store in Houthi-controlled Sadaa, Yemen, October 2015. CRISIS GROUP / Peter Salisbury

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Speaking through CrisisWatch and other publications, Crisis Group performed a great service in drawing international attention to Yemen's conflict and the risks of an attack on Hodeida. — MARTIN GRIFFITHS

the operation risked "pulling Yemen further into a Saudi-Iranian regional struggle, augmenting sectarian divides, and closing any hope of a negotiated political solution". As predicted, a cycle of "escalating violence" started and the conflict increasingly became "intractable" as negotiations proceeded haltingly and without producing a political settlement.
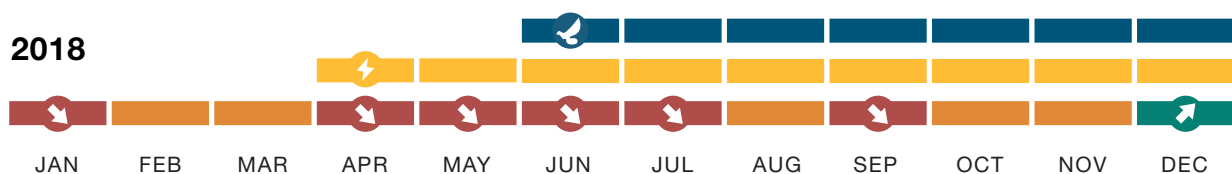
Amid a grim outlook in early 2018, Crisis Group launched a campaign that aimed to call attention to the dangers of an all-out attack by pro-government forces on Hodeida. At the time, the Saudi-led coalition was eyeing a major assault on the city, which Crisis Group believed could precipitate a major humanitarian disaster. From May to June, Crisis Group published analytical "briefing notes" and other outputs urging all actors to avert "a destructive battle for Hodeida" and calling on them to resume negotiations to end the wider conflict. Over three consecutive months, CrisisWatch also released conflict risk alerts spotlighting tit-for-tat attacks on both sides and the risks of further escalation.

By late June, the threat of a full-blown offensive had lessened, but the situation in Hodeida remained precarious. Advancing United Arab Emirates-backed forces (part of the Saudi-led coalition) stopped in the city's outskirts. CrisisWatch kept tracking the volatile situation, assigning a total of six conflict risk alerts

warning about risks of escalatory fighting in Hodeida, while flagging opportunities for progress through confidence-building measures. We also issued several other outputs, including the report *How to Halt Yemen's Slide into Famine*, to stress the human cost of renewed fighting around Hodeida.

By year's end, the situation had improved. The Saudi-led coalition had decided not to attack Hodeida, while mediation efforts spearheaded by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths had made major headway. In December 2018, the government and the Houthis agreed to a series of confidence-building measures in an agreement reached in Sweden. Known as the Stockholm Agreement, the deal included a commitment by the parties to an immediate ceasefire in Hodeida as a step toward future talks about ending the war.

"Speaking through CrisisWatch and other publications, Crisis Group performed a great service in drawing international attention to Yemen's conflict and the risks of an attack on Hodeida. Thankfully that attack was averted – a glimmer of hope amid one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the last decade", said former envoy Griffiths, who is now the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

2018

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |

Sounding the Alarm Ahead of a Devastating War

A devastating war in Tigray erupted in November 2020 as Ethiopia was going through a complex political transition. Crisis Group, through CrisisWatch, other outputs, and targeted advocacy, was instrumental in sounding the alarm early and moving the issue up the list of world concerns.

In June 2020, CrisisWatch warned of "heightened" tensions after Tigrayan leaders made plans to hold regional elections in September in defiance of the federal government's decision to postpone polls due to COVID–19. That same month, in the briefing *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, Crisis Group stressed that the electoral dispute, combined with Amhara claims to land administered by Tigray, could stoke sentiment against Tigray's ruling elite and spark wider confrontation, "potentially exposing ethno-regional cracks in the army's cohesion".

As frictions mounted, Crisis Group cautioned in the July edition of CrisisWatch that federal-Tigray relations were fast deteriorating and in August outlined measures to avert a high-stakes confrontation in the briefing *Toward an End to Ethiopia's Federal–Tigray Feud*. 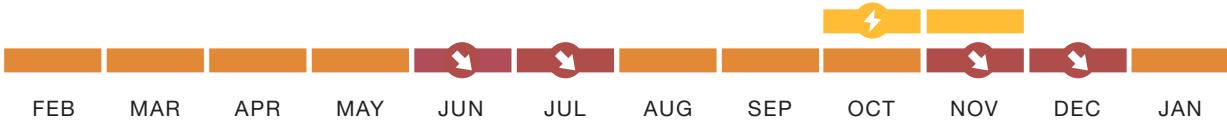In subsequent weeks, the situation in northern Ethiopia grew even more dangerous. CrisisWatch tracked the moves of Tigray authorities to hold elections for its legislative council on 9 September in the teeth of federal opposition. Addis Ababa declared the polls unconstitutional.

Crisis Group issued a CrisisWatch conflict risk alert in October, warning that the federal–Tigray dispute had "reached a breaking point" and could "spark violent escalation" in the coming weeks. Tensions ran particularly high after the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the region's ruling political party, recalled its representatives from Addis Ababa, and Tigray's government declared the federal administration illegitimate. Addis Ababa moved to sever ties with the Tigray leadership and restrict federal assistance to the region. Conflict broke out in Tigray in November.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, Crisis Group kept a close watch on shifts in conflict dynamics, with an eye toward identifying risks of countrywide insecurity that threatened to further destabilise Ethiopia or draw in regional actors, while also encouraging international engagement by highlighting the costs and risks of this prevention failure. These were enormous: estimates

2020   **2021**

FEB   MAR   APR   MAY   JUN   JUL   AUG   SEP   OCT   NOV   DEC   JAN

People displaced due to the fighting rest outside their shelter at the Abi Adi camp for the Internally Displaced Persons in Abi Adi, Tigray Region, Ethiopia, June 24, 2023. REUTERS / Tiksa Negeri

suggest that hundreds of thousands of civilians died and even greater numbers were displaced. There were credible reports of atrocities on all sides.

Both sides saw their fortunes rise and fall, but in the second half of 2022, Addis Ababa secured the decisive upper hand. In September 2022, CrisisWatch warned that the "Tigray conflict had escalated as hostilities expanded to new fronts and Eritrean forces became heavily involved in fighting". In mid-October, we issued a statement urging African and world leaders to step in to avert the risk of mass atrocities in Ethiopia's Tigray. In a welcome step, on 25 October the warring parties met for peace talks and on 2 November, federal and Tigray leaders signed a "permanent cessation of hostilities agreement" in South Africa.

"While it is difficult to ascertain with precision what factors convinced the warring parties to talk – fatigue and heavy losses were likely part of the equation – the relentless work of Crisis Group, including through CrisisWatch tracking, helped mobilise international pressure", said Luuk van de Vondervoort, the Senior Policy Officer for Ethiopia and Djibouti at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Chronicling Haiti's Descent into Chaos

Two years after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, political gridlock and rampant gang violence are pushing Haiti toward collapse, with criminal elements now in control of most of the capital, Port-au-Prince. CrisisWatch detected shifting dynamics early on, helping the organisation to raise the alarm about a country that had largely fallen off the international radar.

In the months before Moïse's killing in July 2021, CrisisWatch tracked rising tensions concerning his leadership and sounded the alarm about the risks of escalating violence. CrisisWatch noted that many viewed Moïse's hold on power and his plans to amend the constitution as a ploy to restore authoritarian rule.

In January 2021, Crisis Group issued a CrisisWatch conflict risk alert, warning of possible trouble if Moïse refused to step down on 7 February, which the opposition argued was the day his mandate expired. The following month, CrisisWatch warned that the situation was taking a turn for the worse after Moïse decided to remain in office, prompting large protests that turned deadly amid a harsh crackdown. As the political crisis worsened, Crisis Group issued another CrisisWatch conflict risk alert in May, raising concerns about the government's choice to proceed in late June

with a referendum on amendments to the national charter, which Moïse's opponents viewed as nothing less than a power grab on his part.

After Moïse's assassination on 7 July, Crisis Group was well positioned to analyse emerging trends because of CrisisWatch's methodical tracking of Haiti's conflict trends. We helped policymakers understand the immediate implications of the killing and associated instability risks in a Q&A, "Handling the Aftermath of Haiti's Presidential Assassination". That month, CrisisWatch observed that the country was plunging into "political turmoil".

In September 2021, we recommended ways to support Haiti at "a time of extreme insecurity". In particular, we urged the country's partners to back the formation of an inclusive interim government, as well as efforts to prosecute high-level crimes and reform the police, in our briefing *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*. We also warned of the risks associated with gang violence and power struggles. The following month, CrisisWatch spotlighted a worrying spike in violence as gangs took advantage of the power vacuum to expand their turf.

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Crisis Group's early and methodical analysis of Haiti's overlapping political, security and humanitarian crises has helped keep the country on the international agenda. Strong coverage in CrisisWatch has served it well in this respect. — VILMA VELÁSQUEZ

JAN   FEB   MAR   APR   MAY   JUN   JUL   AUG   SEP   OCT   NOV   DEC

2021

As Haiti continued on a downward spiral, CrisisWatch kept shedding light on security dynamics, political developments and humanitarian concerns. In December 2022, we published *Haiti's Last Resort: Gangs and the Prospect of Foreign Intervention* in which we analysed the benefits and challenges of an international intervention "in light of the severity of the humanitarian emergency" and described the conditions that would be required in order to set it up for success.

On 29 July, in a welcome development, Kenya offered to lead a multinational force pending UN approval.
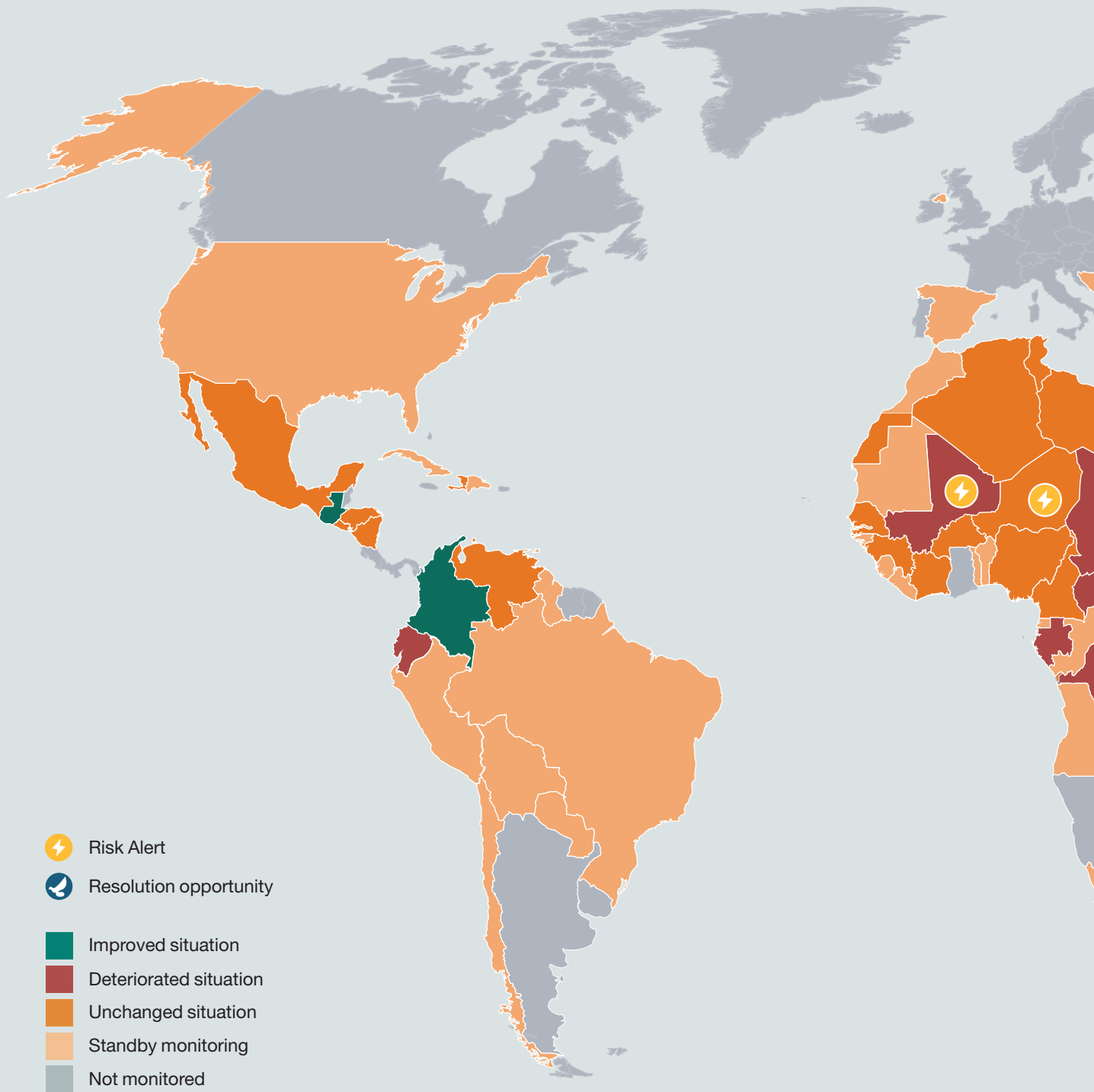
"Crisis Group's early and methodical analysis of Haiti's overlapping political, security and humanitarian crises has helped keep the country on the international agenda. Strong coverage in CrisisWatch has served it well in this respect," said the Colombian consul in Haiti, Vilma Velásquez.
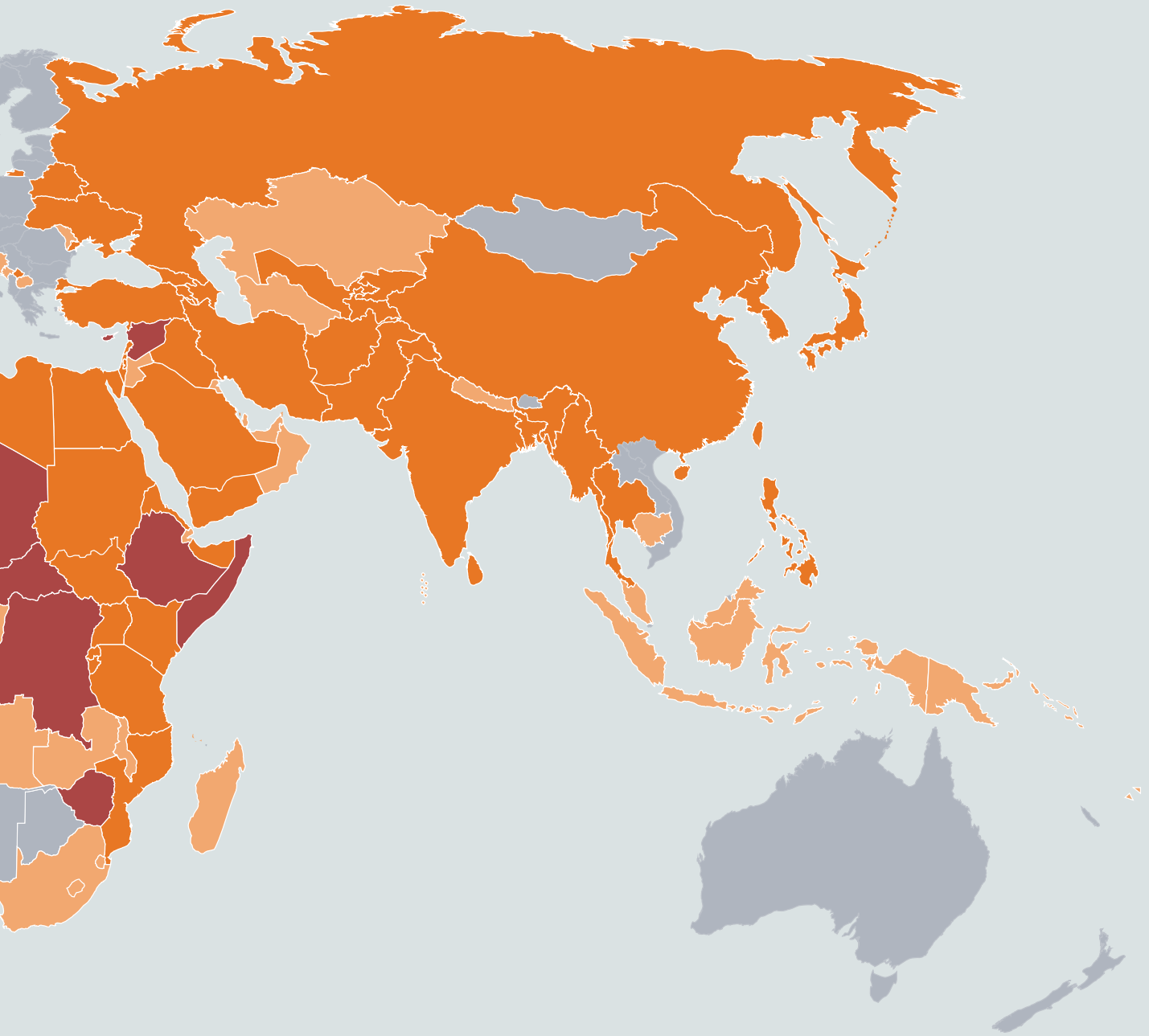
People carry their belongings as they flee their neighbourhood Carrefour Feuilles after gangs took over, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti August 15, 2023. REUTERS / Ralph Tedy Erol

Our Global Conflict Tracker

CrisisWatch is our early warning and global conflict tracker, a tool designed with an interactive map to help decision-makers prevent deadly violence by keeping them up-to-date with developments in over 70 conflicts and crises, identifying trends and alerting them to risks of escalation and opportunities to advance peace.

Legend:

- ⚡ Risk Alert
- 🕊 Resolution opportunity
- Improved situation
- Deteriorated situation
- Unchanged situation
- Standby monitoring
- Not monitored

Crisis Group aspires to be the preeminent organisation providing independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage deadly conflict.

We combine expert in-country research, analysis and engagement with policymakers across the world in order to effect change in the crisis situations on which we work.

We endeavour to talk to all sides and in doing so to build on our role as a trusted source of local information, fresh perspectives and advice for conflict parties and external actors;

www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch

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